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THE LAPPS OF SWEDEN.

BY

E. D. WINSLOW, STOCKHOLM.

In the northern provinces of Sweden and Norway live the Lapps. In many districts and communities they constitute the majority of the population by a large degree; yet, like the Indians on our former western borders, the Lapps show signs of a sure disappearance. The march of our modern civilisation has already set in towards the far north, the wealth of the mines is beginning to be sought, and contact with the white man seems to alarm the sturdy little nomads of the Arctic Circle. In the year 1885 the population of the Swedish Lapps was given out officially as 5,955; while in 1895 the latest figures obtainable indicate that this number has sunk to 5,576.* The County Boards, who have compiled these figures, do not give any reason nor explain in any way the cause of the diminution of the population of the Laplanders. I compare them to our Indians in many things. Like them, they do not till the fields nor live in houses. They subsist chiefly on fish and the flesh of the reindeer. In the winter they live in snow-constructed protections, and in summer tents of skins, with an opening at the top for the escape of smoke, keep them comfortable according to their notion.

The Government wishes to protect the Lapps and at the same time not to interfere with the development of the country and the opening up of that vast region in the Arctic Circle filled with iron, copper and other minerals. Railroads now pierce the former unknown tracts, mines are being developed, prospectors are searching for new treasures, and new cities are springing into life.

The Lapps are short of stature, with high cheek-bones, and seem closely allied to the Mongolian type of mankind. Their wants are few, they are semi-civilised, and the progress of the world at large is of little consequence to them. The Swedes, Norwegians and Finns are supplanting them.

The Swedish Government has enacted laws which apply directly to the Laplanders, and which it was thought would protect them in

* The Swedish Lapps numbered in 1890, according to the *Almanach de Gotha* for 1900 (p. 1101), 6,846. An exact return of such a population is hardly to be expected.

their rights and privileges. Since the year 1886 there has been in force a law passed by the Parliament, setting aside a certain territory in the extreme north for the use of these interesting people. Sections of this territory were to be theirs, for their reindeer and for their homes. But, as with us in the case of the Indian, the County Boards have been continually at work endeavoring to curtail the effect of the law and to hinder its enforcement.

Civilisation cannot exist with semi-civilisation; tilled fields and herds of cattle cannot be neighbors to untilled wastes and droves of reindeer. The wealth of the Lapp consists of his reindeer, and the beast does not seem to thrive as a wholly domestic animal. It is estimated that there are nearly 200,000 reindeer in Sweden alone. The animals are moved about from place to place—in the mountains during the summer and into the valleys during the winter. They rest no long time in one place, and are continually on the move. They are the buffalo of Sweden. The hide clothes the Lapp, the flesh feeds him, the milk furnishes him with cheese, and the young animals draw his sleighs.

The Government has its little problem to solve. It wishes to be just to all its people and yet not hinder the onward movement of civilisation. The proper protection of this good and harmless people is a serious question. To own and raise reindeer is not compatible with the life of the homesteader. The building of railways and the development of mines soon destroy the hunting-ground of the Lapp. The harnessing of the waterfalls, in which this northern country abounds, will destroy the fish.

It would seem almost certain that the Lapp is doomed to extinction, notwithstanding the care and protection that the Government is endeavoring to give him. With his departure will go an interesting member of the human family. He has lived on about the only part of the earth's surface that was the most uninviting. It has been thought possible to move them in colonies to Spitzbergen; but reindeer cannot exist on that island. Science, if it wishes to acquaint itself with the Lapp, his work and daily life and his language, must make the researches without any loss of time, for he is slowly being absorbed, his individuality is disappearing, and the characteristics of the race and the language will soon be found only in history.